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SECRETARY MORTON CALLS FOR MORATORIUM ON WHALING

"We must accelerate the worldwide fight to preserve the great whales," Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton said today while commenting on the fact that after 200 years the United States has now stopped all commercial exploitation of whales.

The Department of the Interior's ban on the importation of whale products, including oil, meat, teeth and ambergris, went into final effect last week. Even the import of foreign cars containing whale oil additive in their transmissions will be affected. In line with Interior's stand, the Department of Commerce will issue no licenses after December 31 to U.S. commercial fishermen to take whales on the Endangered Species list.

"The whales are an international resource belonging to the many and must not be exterminated for the few," he said. "This Administration, acting on principle and despite the unfortunate economic hardship it has brought to some firms, has set an example that hopefully other nations will follow."

"We have done everything we can unilaterally. We must now concentrate our efforts on getting the International Whaling Commission to enforce their own regulations and to set realistic catch quotas by individual species and area in order to allow a maximum rebuilding of all whale populations."

At its annual meeting last June, the Commission had agreed unanimously that all member nations should implement the international observer scheme for the 1971-72 whaling season. "I was keenly disappointed that the Soviet and Japanese whaling fleets sailed for the Antarctic in October with no international observers on board," Morton said. "It is clear that time is running out for the whales."

"If the Commission cannot move quickly and surely to meet its international obligations, a moratorium on all whaling is the only solution. Both houses of Congress have passed a resolution calling for a 10-year moratorium and we support it," Morton said.

"As long as man views these magnificent creatures as solely an economic product, we are in grave danger of destroying the complex web of life of which man is an inextricable part."

"In this environmental decade, it would be barbarous to stand idly by while the last of earth's largest and--next to man--most intelligent creatures are reduced to pet food, face creams and lubricating oils," said Morton. "All whale products have synthetic substitutes and are no longer essential to man's well-being. Yet the rate of killing in recent years has already driven some species to the brink of extinction and now threatens those few remaining species whose populations are still large enough to be commercially exploitable."

It was in an effort to halt this slaughter that Interior last December placed all eight species of great whales on its list of endangered foreign wildlife. This move cut off a U.S. market which had consumed more than 20 percent of the world's whale products.

However, a "hardship clause" in the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 allowed 12 months in which firms that import and use such products could fulfill existing contracts. All special permits issued for this purpose during the past year by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service expired on midnight of December 1, 1971. The last import permit for whale oil was issued in August and the last for meat products in December 1970.

In September this year the Fish and Wildlife Service denied a request by a major importer for an additional 3,000 long tons of sperm whale oil. Officials said they felt that granting such a request, well above the firm's previous importation levels, could only result in more endangered whales being killed.

"Another valid reason to stop whaling," Morton said, "is the recent discovery by the Food and Drug Administration of excess mercury in whale meat." More than a million pounds of contaminated meat destined for pet food have been seized.

Morton concluded, "Now that the U.S. no longer has any commercial interest in whales, either as harvester or as consumer, we are in a position to provide leadership in the worldwide drive to preserve the whale as a vital part of the marine ecosystem."

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